

# THE RETURN OF THE *MALÓN*. A QUANTITATIVE APPROXIMATION TO THE INDIGENOUS INCURSIONS IN THE PAMPAS

EL REGRESO DEL *MALÓN*.  
UN ACERCAMIENTO CUANTITATIVO  
A LAS INCURSIONES INDÍGENAS EN LAS PAMPAS

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to systematize the existing information about the inter-ethnic *malones* in the Southern Frontier between the years of 1860 and 1875, on the eve of the so-called “conquest of the desert”. We set out to identify the incursions that took place during the period, observing their occurrence in different frontier areas, the different participating leaders and groups, the amount of warriors, and the results they had regarding the appropriation of cattle and captives. With this information, we tried to build an overview about the indigenous incursions in the totality of the frontiers. That is why we sidelined the analysis of the political dynamics characteristic of the different frontier regions, prioritizing the observation of global aspects. But it is precisely from the treatment of the borders as a whole that we can risk some hypotheses about aspects of the indigenous policies.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es sistematizar la información existente sobre los *malones* interétnicos en la Frontera Sur entre los años 1860 y 1875, en vísperas de la llamada “conquista del desierto”. Para ello nos propusimos identificar las incursiones ocurridas durante el período observando su ocurrencia en diferentes áreas fronterizas, los distintos líderes y agrupaciones participantes, la cantidad de guerreros y sus resultados en cuanto a la apropiación de ganado y cautivos. Con esa información intentamos construir un panorama general sobre las incursiones indígenas a la totalidad de las fronteras. Por ello pusimos entre paréntesis el análisis de las dinámicas políticas propias de los diferentes espacios fronterizos priorizando la observación de aspectos globales. Pero es precisamente a partir del tratamiento de las fronteras en conjunto que podremos arriesgar algunas hipótesis sobre aspectos de la política indígena que habrían quedado oscurecidos en una mirada acotada a un espacio o grupo en particular.

## KEYWORDS

*Malones* - Mapuche - Pampas - Southern Frontier - Argentina - XIX Century - Puelmapu

## PALABRAS CLAVE

*Malones* - Mapuche - Pampas - Frontera Sur - Siglo XIX - Puelmapu

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## INTRODUCTION

The *malones* or *Indian invasions*, quick war operations aimed at capturing cattle and captives, occupied until few decades ago a central place in the historiography about indigenous groups of the Pampas and northern Patagonia in the period before to the so-called “conquest of the desert”<sup>1</sup>. These were reconstructions, made from a fundamentally military perspective, which contributed to the configuration of an epic tale, destined to legitimize the territorial expansion of the Argentine state<sup>2</sup>. From the beginning of the 1980s, new perspectives provided by the fields of anthropology and history have modified the picture. These contributions have broadened our knowledge of indigenous groups, the process of state expansion, and frontier spaces, incorporating the analyses of numerous dimensions sidestepped by the traditional approach, like diplomatic

ties, indigenous participation in creole conflicts, the long-standing presence of *indios amigos* in the vicinity of *cristianas* populations, and the trade<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, the historiographic fracture between the east and west of the Andes mountain range –currently Chile and Argentina– that does not reflect the unique nature of the Mapuche indigenous space prior to the conquest campaigns has also begun to be demolished.

This reconfiguration of the country side undoubtedly modified the traditional way of conceiving indigenous incursions. These ceased to be thought of as a constant presence on the borders to be analyzed as part of concrete historical processes, which included other types of non-violent ties. The unilateral character with which the stereotype of the *malón* carried indigenous societies introduced *cristiana* violence, previously relegated by researchers. The “irrationality” attributed to the *malón*

<sup>1</sup> “Conquest of the desert” is the name that has traditionally been given to the military campaigns carried out between 1878 and 1884 that culminated with the definitive occupation of the southern territory the Argentine State claimed as its own.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the most influential being José Manuel Olascoaga, *Estudio Topográfico de la pampa y el río negro* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba [1880] 1974) and Estanislao Zeballos, *La conquista de 15.000 leguas. Ensayo para la ocupación definitiva de la Patagonia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Continente, [1878] 2008), all of them participants of the expansion campaigns. Already in the 20th century, Juan Carlos Whalter, *La conquista del desierto* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba [1949] 1973). Nevertheless, more recently, works with this perspective, for example Norberto Ras, *La guerra por las vacas* (Buenos Aires: Galerna 2007), have continued to be published, which continues to dominate non-academic approaches.

<sup>3</sup> In a narrow and therefore unjust list, the contributions of Martha Bechis, *Piezas de Etnohistoria del sur sudamericano* (Madrid: CSIC, 2008); *Piezas de Etnohistoria y de antropología histórica* (Buenos Aires: SAA, 2011); Julio Vezub, *Valentín Saygüequé y la Gobernación Indígena de las Manzanas. Poder y etnicidad en la Patagonia Septentrional* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2009); Ingrid de Jong, “Las alianzas políticas indígenas en el período de la organización nacional,” in *De los cacicazgos a la ciudadanía. Sistemas políticos en la frontera, siglos XVIII-XIX*, edited by Mónica Quijada. (Berlín: Gebr Mann Verlag, 2011); “Entre el malón, el comercio y la diplomacia: Dinámicas de la política indígena en las fronteras pampeanas. Siglos XVIII y XIX. Un balance historiográfico,” in *Revista Tiempo Histórico* 6/11 (Santiago 2016): 17-40; Ingrid de Jong y Guido Cordero, “El malón en contrapunto: dinámicas de la diplomacia, el comercio y la guerra en la Frontera Sur (s. XVIII y XIX),” in *Los saqueos en la historia argentina. Variaciones de una acción colectiva*, edited by Gabriel Di Meglio et al. (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI), 63-89; Daniel Villar and Juan Francisco Jiménez, “La tempestad de la guerra: conflictos indígenas y circuitos de intercambio,” in *Las fronteras hispano criollas del mundo indígena latinoamericano en los siglos XVIII y XIX*, compiled by Raúl Mandrini et al. (Neuquén, Bahía Blanca, Tandil: UNC, UNS, UniCen 2003); Daniel Villar y Juan Francisco Jiménez, “Amigos, hermanos y parientes. Líderes y liderados en las Sociedades Indígenas de la Pampa Oriental (1820-1840). Etnogénesis Llailmache,” in *Amigos, hermanos y parientes. Líderes y liderados en las Sociedades Indígenas de la Pampa Oriental (S. XIX)*, edited by Daniel Villar et al. (Bahía Blanca: CDP-UNS, 2011); Guillaume Boccard, *Los vencedores: historia del pueblo mapuche en la época colonial* (San Pedro de Atacama: IIAM, 2007); Leonardo León Solís, *Maloneros y conchavadores en la Araucanía y las Pampas. 1780-1800* (Temuco: Universidad de la Frontera, 1990); Marcela Tamagnini and Graciana Perez, *El fondo de la tierra. Destinos errantes en la frontera sur* (Río Cuarto: Editorial de la URC, 2010); Jorge Pinto Rodríguez, *De la inclusión a la exclusión. La formación del estado, la nación y el pueblo mapuche* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad de Santiago de Chile, 2000) can't be ignored.

gave rise to political and economic considerations. Regarding the latter, a less simplistic view of indigenous production was leaving the notion of “predation” to give rise to the analysis of pastoral and agricultural practices east of the Andes, previously denied<sup>4</sup>.

The relevance attributed to the *malones* in the indigenous economy of the Pampas, and of the pan-Mapuche area in general, however, has just begun to be questioned. Additionally, the nature and volume of the trade that linked the Pampas with Araucanía, and the role of the *malones* in them, is also the subject of discussion<sup>5</sup>. We do not, however, have quantitative studies that allow us to measure the effects of the incursions, both in their economic face and in their consequences on border populations, to support the views on this. Was the *malón* a central aspect of the Mapuche economy of the Pampas, expressed in a regular practice? Was it a practice linked to regional cattle circuits or was it linked to the consumption of attackers? And going beyond its economic aspect, did it express a homogeneous and concerted response to Christians or should it be thought of in terms of political projects of different groups? How did they relate to the socio-political logic of indigenous groups? We believe that these and other

questions may be better thought in light of systematic data that have not yet been constructed.

The objective of this article, then, is to systematize the existing information about the inter-ethnic *malones* in the Southern Frontier between the years of 1860 and 1875, on the eve of the expedition that expanded the borderline, making a definitive turn on the relative military equilibrium that up until then had characterized the relations between the indigenous groups and the Argentine state. To achieve this, we set out to identify the incursions that took place during the period, observing their occurrence in different frontier areas, the different participating leaders and groups, the amount of warriors, and the results they had regarding the appropriation of cattle and captives. With this information, we tried to build an overview about the indigenous incursions in the totality of the borders. That is why we sidelined the analysis of the political dynamics characteristic of the different frontier regions, prioritizing the observation of global aspects. But it's precisely from the treatment of the borders as a whole that we can risk some hypotheses about aspects of the indigenous policies that would've been left in the dark with a limited look at a space or group in particular.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding this issue, the seminal works of Raúl Mandrini, “La agricultura indígena en la región pampeana y sus adyacencias (siglos XVII-XIX)”, *Anuario IEHS* 1 (Tandil 1986); “Desarrollo de una sociedad indígena pastoril en el área interserrana bonaerense”, *Anuario del IEHS* 2 (Tandil 1987); “Las transformaciones de la economía indígena bonaerense (1600-1820)”, in *Huellas en la tierra. Indios, agricultores y hacendados en la pampa bonaerense*, R. Mandrini y A. Reguera (eds.), (Tandil: IEHS/UNCPBA, 1994); “¿Sólo de caza y robos vivían los indios? La organización económica de los cacicatos pampeanos del siglo XIX”, in *Siglo XIX. Revista de Historia*, 2a época, 15 (México 1994) as well as more recent contributions by Sebastián Alioto, “Las yeguas y las chacras de Calfucurá: Economía y Política del Cacicato Salinero (1853-1859)”, en *Amigos, hermanos y parientes. Líderes y liderados en las Sociedades Indígenas de la Pampa Oriental (SXIX)*, D. Villar, y J. F. Jiménez, (ed.). (Bahía Blanca: Centro de Documentación Patagónica, Departamento de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional del Sur, 2011), can be mentioned.

<sup>5</sup> A traditional scheme on indigenous incursions in the Pampas links them with trade on the Mapuche-Chilean borders. This perspective has been relativized by Sebastián Alioto, *Indios y ganado en la frontera. La ruta del río Negro (1750-1830)* (Rosario: Prohistoria 2011) and Guido Cordero, *Malón y política. Loncos y weichafes en la frontera sur (1860-1875)* (Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2019).

The article is organized in four parts, followed by a general recapitulation in which we develop some conclusions and hypotheses. In the first part, we will show, in the highest level of generality, the number of incursions to the whole of the northern frontier of the indigenous territory. Subsequently we will unbundle this accounting of *malones*, proposing an operative classification that will allow us to problematize and go in depth over the initially presented scene. Thirdly, we will differentiate between distinct areas in the borders and ascriptions of the *maloneros*, anticipating some hypotheses about the indigenous policy in the period, which we will get back to at the end. Lastly, we will try to quantify the effects of the indigenous incursions in regards to appropriation of cattle, capture of prisoners, and homicides among the rural population and the Christian settlers. Before introducing ourselves into the body of our presentation, it will be necessary to make some methodological specifications.

## METHODOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

An analysis based on quantitative data like the one we are attempting here implies a series of difficulties in relation to the available sources. That is why we have put special care in explicitly stating the different problems we encountered. This article has been elaborated on the basis of two primary sources: the *Fronteras con los Indios* fund, belonging to the Servicio Histórico del Ejército (SHE), and the

Reports of the Ministry of War and Navy (*Memorias del Ministerio de Guerra y Marina*, MMGM) presented to the national legislature between the years 1863 and 1876. The *Fronteras con los Indios* fund is made up of forty-seven boxes, from which thirty-five correspond to the period that concerns us. Each one of them holds a variable number of documents that goes from half a hundred to a little over two hundred.

The MMGM are publications presented by the executive power at the beginning of each legislative year in which the state of forces of the country, the internal and external military avatars and the situation of the so-called “internal frontiers” were summarized. A general part was followed by a series of annexes in which documentation serving as documentary evidence of what was affirmed by the minister was transcribed. These annexes in particular were the ones we found useful.

The notes and reports published in the MMGM and the ones we have gathered in the SHE are not equivalent, which could answer to various causes. The MMGM do not cover all the years we survey, given that they started to be published after the unification of the country that followed the battle of *Pavón*, and they were not published in one of the years we cover<sup>6</sup>. On the other side, in some cases the communications transcribed in the memories are altered in comparison to the originals in the SHE, for presumably

<sup>6</sup> Between 1852 and 1862 the province of Buenos Aires and the rest of the provinces that make up the Republic of Argentina made up two autonomous states, confronted against each other. They were not published in the year 1867. The year 1875, on the other hand, is less complete than the preceding years, due to a revolution taking place the year before, coincidentally with the change of government.

political reasons, although we consider this has been rather exceptional.

The amount of *malones* we found registered in one source and not the other, and vice versa is to our understanding more notable. The documents saved in the SHE are sharply fragmented; they are notes, debriefings and reports of different kinds sent from all frontier military command headquarters that were subsequently unified in a single fund and ordered chronologically<sup>7</sup>. The annexes found in the MMGM regarding the *malones*, on the contrary, order those events of which the ministry wished to take account and that were summarized in its central exposition. In this sense, our search in the SHE functioned as a sort of “control” on the “official” incursions on the frontier, allowing us to add *malones* that for whatever reason were not informed by the ministry. However, we have also found incursions mentioned in the MMGM that did not appear in the documentation of the SHE, which warns us about a probable underreporting, the relevance of which is very difficult to estimate.

This underreporting in the SHE could answer to different motives. Part of the documents catalogued by the archive have been subtracted or lost. The fund reflects in an unbalance between notes sent by different commands. This might be because of the loss of documentation before the fund was constituted<sup>8</sup>, or because

of it being sent to other offices from which they ended up making up the fund of other archives<sup>9</sup>. The underreporting of incursions does not affect them all the same way. The big *malones*, those that mobilized a significant number of warriors and had substantial effects on the frontier populations, are usually repeated in both the SHE and the MMGM. This does not seem at all surprising, given that precisely these ones are the events that generated the most notorious political and military repercussions. In that regard, we worked under the assumption that the most part of the unregistered incursions correspond to those of relatively minor importance. However, for the interpretation of the data we will show in this article, the utmost attention must be paid to this eventual sub estimation.

This is not the only possible source of mistakes. In some cases, the documents present a detailed report of an indigenous incursion but, in most cases, the information obtained is fragmentary. Written in the moment of returning from a persecution, during it or in the moment of being warned of the entry of *maloneros* to the frontier, the notes in numerous occasions only provide us with partial information that is not always followed in successive notes of better judgement. This generated various kinds of problems that we have tried to get through.

<sup>7</sup> This caused a modification of the original order, so documents that will show up here quoted as found in a particular box might be found in other articles or books found in other boxes. We have opted to mention the documents according to their number and box, which is the way in which we have mostly found the bibliography, even though the current order of the archive is according to the box number followed by its order number.

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the reduction of documents to serve political happenings that shook the frontiers, like during the mitrista revolution of the year 1874 or the reorganization that followed the unification of the country, is notable.

<sup>9</sup> Some communications that are mentioned in the MMGM are found in some funds from the General Archive of the Nation.



In some occasions, the mobilization of the troops because of Indian entry resulted unnecessary because it did not actually come to be. This could have been a result of a retreat of the *maloneros* from being discovered without entering the towns or simply because of a false alarm. Sadly, we do not always count with chained communications that permit us to follow the direction of a partial data on the occurrence of a *malón*. This means that some warnings of “Indian invasion” that we count as *malones* could correspond to incursions that never happened. However, the fact that there are no later documents that confirm this warning does not mean we can rule out it happened. Before these situations, and there where our search in secondary sources and other archives have failed, we have opted to include them. Contrary to the underreporting already mentioned, this implies that in the data presented, incursions that never took place might appear, although, it is unlikely that this would happen with those of a certain magnitude. The decision to include them, also takes into account that the indigenous attacks have frequently been exaggerated by the traditional historiography.

Another possible mistake in the systematization could consist in considering as different entries of the Indians that which is actually a sole attack, or the opposite: considering as a single *malón* what were independent happenings. In the first case, it could happen if it appears fractured in the sources by communications of frontier bosses, fort commanders or peace judges that had not communicated between them when writing down what had happened. In the opposite case, different attacks are erroneously considered

a coordinated action by those writing the documents we are working with. When we have enough documentation about a particular event this mistake is easy to avoid. When in doubt, however, we have preferred to count every attack as independent, assuming the risk of registering more than there actually were.

We insist, in that the problems we are pointing out affect fundamentally the smallest *malones*, those we suspect are also underreported. We usually have more detailed information regarding the more important incursions. In all, big and small, we have looked to identify some variables: the number of *malones*, that we subtracted by the area where they took place and the moment they happened; the number of participants of the incursion, there where the sources have informed us; the effects on the frontier populations regarding cattle and prisoner capture, as well as death of civil population, military personal and *maloneros*; and the ascription that the sources attribute to the attacking people to some faction or *cacicato*.

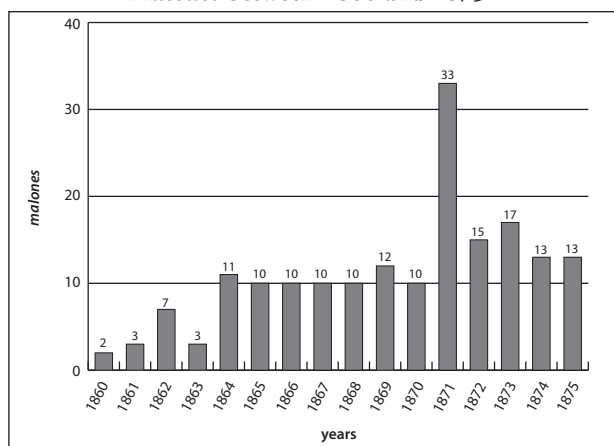
The numbers resulting from our systematization should not be read as a definitive description of the inter-ethnic *malones* in this period. Some of the analysed variables, like the number of warriors in one *malón* or the quantity of head of cattle taken, necessarily refer to approximate quantities. On the other side, they could also correspond to the voluntary distortion, falsification and subtraction of information destined to sustain the prestige of the frontier authorities, aggravate their rivals or avoid the register of illegal or debatable practices.

That is why we assume that the numbers that follow, constructed from the addition of approximate and tentative data, produced in circumstances and by authors in which the biases and deformations were far from being exceptional, should not be considered definitive. They constitute, we hope, a good starting point to get to know some characteristics of the *malones* that would be harder to visualize without the global perspective we have adopted here. Lastly, a warning about the general order is due. The objective of this work is to carry out a systematization of the indigenous *malones* on the frontier populations. In this sense, we take the risk of reproducing an image of life on the frontier we object. The accounting of violent events might lead to sidestep the existence of other simultaneous forms of relation between Indians and *cristianos* and even reinforce the image of a radical conflict between both that does not follow from the complexity of life on the frontier.

## **MALONES BETWEEN 1860 AND 1875**

Firstly, we will make a note of the number of incursions that occurred during this period. We do not distinguish, for now, the area or locality in which it took place, or its significance. Between 1860 and 1875, we recorded a total of 179 *malones* at different border points. Except for four of these fifteen years, the annual number of incursions shows a striking regularity close to 11 *malones* a year, in average. It is hard to determine how significant the underreporting was during those years in which we found the least incursions (1860, 1861 and 1863). It is possible, therefore, for the data with which we are working to be less exhaustive during those years. The growth of incursions in the year 1871, which in fact registered an important increase in conflict, could also reflect the circumstance. We have summarized them in Figure number 1.

**Figure number 1.**  
***Malones* between 1860 and 1875**



Source: Compiled from SHE and MMGM.

These *malones* were not distributed in a completely random way during the months of every year<sup>10</sup>. The “seasonal” nature of the indigenous incursions has already been pointed out in the literature about the frontiers. It is generally attributed to the importance of the “Chilean”<sup>11</sup> contingents—coming from the *Araucanía* or the cordillera’s eastern foothills—in the *maloneras* forces, who spent the winter in the *Pampas* and participated in incursions preferably during the spring so they could return before the next winter began. In the sources, the “*malón* season” is occasionally mentioned, though they do not always agree in the months to which this refers<sup>12</sup>. Without a doubt, specific characteristics of the geographies at different points in the frontier will also acquire relevance regarding the possibility of making an incursion in certain moments of the year<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, there is a certain disproportion in the months of spring—37% of the *malones* happened between October and December—this, however, doesn’t exclude the other months, with a barely smaller proportion of incursions—specially in March, April and August—. On the other hand, while there are months evidently less represented in the incursions, fundamentally during the summer and the winter, there is no month in which they do not occur.

Summarizing; the *malones* in the frontiers, taking into account the mentioned precautions, seem to have been quite regular during these years. This is remarkable considering that the circumstances and the diplomatic avatars between the different indigenous groups and the *cristianos* varied considerably in the course of these fifteen years. The first step we have taken in this section (the simple quantification of the incursions) has to be made more complex. Below we will start breaking down this first chart by the proposal of a first classification of the *malones*.

### SMALL, MEDIUM-SIZED AND BIG MALONES

To advance another step we will propose an operative typology while there are various typological suggestions, both in traditional literature and in more recent one, the criteria we adopt here does not strictly fit any of them. The oldest, without a doubt, is the proposal to distinguish the *malones* depending on whether their objectives were “political” or “economical”, which results clearly impracticable with our sources—that rarely inform about the objectives of the *maloneros*—besides the difficulties presented at attempting to establish a restricted delimitation between them<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> In the case of two of the registered *malones*, we do not have a date beyond the year in which they happened. What follows, then, refers to 183 *malones*.

<sup>11</sup> The “Chilean” term can refer to groups of the *Araucanía* or the east of the Andes mountain range. The presence of these groups, in the first case, becomes important for the perspectives that assume the demand for cattle in Chile as the ultimate cause of the *malones*.

<sup>12</sup> In a note from the commander of the Southern Frontier from 1866, there is a warning about the start of the “invasion season”, referring to autumn (SHE, Box 19, Doc 3439). Commonly, however, it refers to spring.

<sup>13</sup> In January of 1866, the commander of Patagones informs having discharged the soldiers because of an impossibility of an incursion during the summer (SHE, Box 19, Doc. 981). As seen in another note, from December 1871, this would be because “the journeys they have to go through to steal in this season are an obstacle for them” (SHE, Box 34, Doc. 1289).

<sup>14</sup> This distinction was already present in texts contemporaneous to the validity of the frontier like Álvaro Barros, *Frateras y territorios federales de las pampas del sur* (Buenos Aires: Solar-Hachette, [1872] 1975.) and has been retaken recently by authors such as Eduardo Crivelli Montero, “Malón, ¿Saqueo o estrategia?”, in *Revista Todo es Historia* 283 (Buenos Aires 1991). While recognize their analytic value, have questioned its usefulness de Sebastián Alioto, *Indios y ganado en la frontera. La ruta del río Negro (1750-1830)* (Rosario: Prohistoria, 2011).



Other classifications, like León's<sup>15</sup> and Boccará's<sup>16</sup>, seem a lot more fertile for the analysis of political processes both intra and inter-ethnic, but they don't offer an adequate tool for what we intend to do in this article. In both cases, what's proposed are tripartite classifications that, unfolded in a continuous, show different meanings in the motives behind the *malón*, as well as distinct intensities in effective violence, and in the political articulations both intra and inter-tribal needed for the passage of one category to the next<sup>17</sup>. However, the information we have is fragmented, which makes it difficult –or impossible– to get close to the concrete meanings that most part of the registered *malones* had, from the point of view of who carried them out. In the same way, only in a few cases we have evidence of the agreements and allegiances implied in the identified *malones*.

We're inclined, instead, to use as a base to our typology an aspect that is also central in the analysis of the mentioned authors at the same time that is consistent with the only “native” distinction with which we count to differentiate inter-ethnic *malones*: the *cuero-tún* –small attacks made to capture cattle without the participation of the *cacicatos*– and *fta-que-malón* –big *malones*– suggested by Alioto and Jiménez<sup>18</sup>. In short, we will distinguish the incursions according to the

amount of warriors –*conas*– participant. With this, we are attempting to define the presence or lack thereof of big groups or coalitions, as well as leaderships of different significances. A big *malón* required the mobilization of a whole social machinery that from a start was only at the disposition of those big caciques –*Futa Longko*– that had constructed a big kinship network and political authority<sup>19</sup>. On the other extreme, small incursions of a couple dozens of warriors are hard to distinguish from the gangs of thieves that habitually acted in the frontier.

Between these two big groups, we opted to incorporate a third that we will call “medium-sized” *malones*, from a lack of a better expression. Incursions in which, while the number of *conas* clearly exceeds what could correspond to a handful of allied families for an isolated sacking, it does not necessarily imply the degree of mobilization that is a necessary condition for the participation in a *Futa Longko*. In this way, the small *malones* –a handful of warriors, usually related–, the medium-sized *malones* –an important number of *maloneros*, led by a cacique of a certain relevance– and the big *malones* –an attack of huge magnitude, necessarily organized with the approval and participation of the main caciques and generally expressing the allegiance of different groups– are

<sup>15</sup> Leonardo León Solís, “Conflictos de poder y guerras tribales en Araucanía y Las Pampas: La batalla de Tromen (1774)”, in *Historia* 29 (Santiago 1995-1996): 185-233.

<sup>16</sup> Boccará, *Los vencedores: historia del pueblo mapuche...*

<sup>17</sup> Villar and Jiménez, “La tempestad de la guerra:...

<sup>18</sup> Sebastián Alioto and Juan Francisco Jiménez, “Transcripción de los apuntes de Zeballos con notas sobre su contenido y léxico”, in *Amigos, hermanos y parientes. Líderes y liderados en las sociedades indígenas de la Pampa Oriental (S. XIX)*, edited by Villar and Jiménez (Bahía Blanca: CDP-UNS, 2011). The authors take both expressions from the transcriptions of interviews made at the end of the 19th century to the cacique Namuncurá.

<sup>19</sup> Ingrid de Jong and Guido Cordero, “El *malón* en contrapunto: dinámicas de la diplomacia, el comercio y la guerra en la Frontera Sur (s. XVIII y XIX)”, in *Los saqueos en la historia argentina. Variaciones de una acción colectiva*. Gabriel Di Meglio and Sergio Serulnikov (ed). (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2017), 63-89.

presented to us as three modalities, precariously distinguishable from one another with the documentation we work with.

The cuts between these three groups imply a certain degree of arbitrariness. For the first group we have taken the number of a hundred warriors, a number we consider that is capable of being summoned by a secondary *longko*, or *capitanejo*. A *toldo* was made up of more or less ten people, of which one or two approximately had possibilities of combating, which means that a hundred warriors equals around fifty families, a significant number but liable to respond to a *capitanejo* or minor *cacique*<sup>20</sup>. Either way, a hundred is the maximum number we accept in this category and is not the most frequently. In fact, 85% corresponds to *malones* of less than fifty warriors, which means, following the mentioned criteria, not more than twenty-five families. With a hundred warriors, we identify 8 *malones* (10%), with between fifty and eighty warriors, 4 *malones* (5%), up to fifty warriors, 40 *malones* (49%). Lastly, in numerous communications they do not risk a concrete number, recurring to expressions like “a bunch of Indians”, “a small party”, a “small group”, etc. We include all these events under the group

of small *malones* and they constitute a total of 29 *malones* (36%).

For the second group we have considered all the *malones* bigger than the previous as long as they did not get to five hundred warriors. In 48% (13) of the medium-sized *malones* participated between two and three hundred warriors, in 37% (10) between three hundred and four hundred and in 10% (4) between 100 and one hundred and fifty.

Lastly, we have considered as “big *malones*” all of those that mobilized at least five hundred warriors. In the big *malones* the differences in magnitude between *malones* are also a lot bigger in this group: from the lower limit of five hundred warriors estimated, that suppose the authority of caciques of a certain importance, to the highest extreme of this slot in which we registered *malones* with three thousand and seven hundred and five thousand *conas*, that necessarily implicate the organization of various main caciques in allegiance. In the table number 1 we summarize the big *malones* that we have registered according to their size:

**Table Number 1.**  
**Big *malones* between 1860 and 1875**

Amount of warriors	500	600	700	800	900	1000	1300	1500	2000	3700	5000
Number of <i>malones</i>	4	4	3	2	1	5	1	2	3	1	1

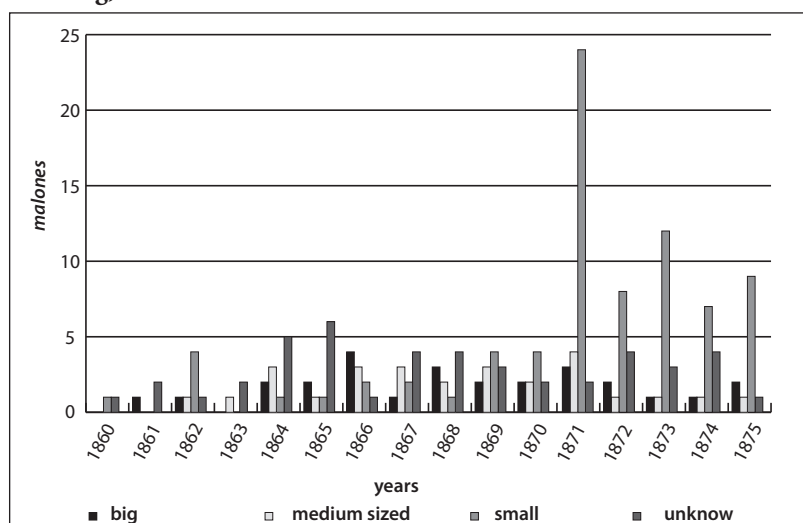
Source: Compiled from SHE and MMGM.

<sup>20</sup> Alioto, *Indios y ganado en la frontera...*

From the total of 179 *malones*, then, we have identified 81 small ones (42%), 27 medium-sized ones (15%) and 27 big ones (15%). It is necessary to mention that we do not have estimations on the number of warriors for all of the *malones*, thus the 44 remaining (25%) correspond to incursions on which the sources do not risk an estimation. As mentioned, either way, we suppose the in most cases they

are small *malones*, or alarms that did not result in a real incursion. However, we have preferred counting them apart given that in some punctual cases where we do not have a number on the warriors, other elements present in the documents—like a big number of animals appropriated or references to “a great number of Indians” or “a great party”—seem to point towards medium-sized or big *malones*. We have summarized this data in Figure number 2:

**Figure Number 2:**  
**Big, medium-size and small *malones* between 1860 and 1875**



Source: Compiled from SHE and MMGM.

As we can see, in most of the years what predominates are small *malones*, or those on which we do not have data, probably corresponding mostly to that same group, considering we have also pointed out that those might be affected by an underregister that is difficult to determine. These small *malones* seem to have increased their frequency during the decade of 1870, or they were better represented in the sources during that

decade. Either way, their regularity seems more marked than that of the other two groups, which still present this certain stability we have observed when putting them together. We believe this happens because they reflect an autonomous dynamic, to a certain point, of the state of political relations between *crístianos* and Indians or, at least, with the main leaders of these last ones.

We may now resume the question of the seasonal nature: The occurrence of medium-sized and big *malones* was a lot more accentuated during the spring and the autumn, besides presenting months where in fifteen years incursions of that size did not happen. It is possible that this obeys to the presence of extra-Pampeano allies in *malones* of more importance and reflects the regional circuits of cattle better, although certainly not with exactitude. The small *malones*, in contrast, besides being as we have seen the most numerous, result harder to associate to a particular time of the year. While a somehow bigger proportion can be observed during the same months as the other incursions, the small *malones* occur during the entire year. We believe this is consistent with their autonomy regarding allegiances and strategies of the *cacicatos* and their opportunistic and anarchic nature.

Besides the seasonality, we have seen up to this point an accentuated predominance of small *malones*, and *malones* on which we have no data, that we mostly include in those. We have observed as well that these groups seem to be less stable in time than other types of incursions, and we attribute this to their autonomy regarding their partialities of belonging and political strategies of these and of their leaders. This autonomy, of course, did not stop the *cuero-tún* from having

consequences in the frontier politics. The medium-sized and big *malones*, in contrast, continue to show a certain regularity with the passing of the years that requires a second step of problematization.

#### THE “SALINERO” AND “RANQUEL” BORDERS

Up until now, we have presented the incursions as coming from a homogeneous actor: indigenous society, even though we know that during this period it was politically multi-centre and its different fractions did not develop a way of unambiguous relation with the Christian governments. In this way, the *manzaneros* of the patagonic north maintained peace during that whole period<sup>21</sup>. While the *pehuenches* of the south of what is now the Mendoza territory participated in certain occasions of incursions<sup>22</sup>, they seem to have had a secondary role during those years with respect to the main groups of the Pampa: the *Salineros*, led by the *Futa Longko* Calfucurá until his death in 1873, and the *Ranqueles*. We know both had variable and not always coinciding strategies during those fifteen years<sup>23</sup>. To these central actors it's also necessary to add the autonomous actions of groups of smaller size, referenced formally in the big *caciques*, *Ranqueles* or *Salineros* or, as is the case of Pincén, that will become

<sup>21</sup> Julio Vezub, *Valentín Saygüequé y la Gobernación Indígena de las Manzanas. Poder y etnicidad en la Patagonia Septentrional* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2009). This does not mean, however, that some warriors from the manzanas could not have participated in incursions during this period.

<sup>22</sup> The *malones* in which pehuenches are mentioned during this period are few, of the 6 *malones* occurred in the south of Mendoza, 3 were attributed to this group: In August of 1869, a group of 300 warriors accompanied by creole and Chilean bandits (MMGM 1871:240-269); in June of 1871, an incursion whose leadership is attributed to the cacique Purrán (MMGM 1872:27-33); and in December of 1873 with a small party led by the cacique Udalman (SHE Box35 Doc. 1204).

<sup>23</sup> De Jong, “Las alianzas políticas indígenas en el período...”

important from 1870 on, conducting a group independent of both<sup>24</sup>.

To distinguish the presence of different groups or leaders in the *malones*, however, is not always an easy deed. Only on 57 (32%) of the noted *malones*, the person who wrote the source mentioned who were the supposed invaders<sup>25</sup>. In those, the attribution of the *maloneros* to a group or leader usually matches that one closer to the attacked frontiers: Ranqueles in the Buenos Aires north, Santa Fe, San Luis, Córdoba and Mendoza frontiers, and Salineros in the western and southern Buenos Aires frontiers. This happens even in those *malones* that appear mentioned in other groups. Thus, when in the Buenos Aires frontiers the presence of Ranqueles, “Chileans”, *indios amigos* or of some of their leaders is noted, this always happens in incursions led by Calfucurá or other Salinero caciques. In a similar way, the *malones* in the other frontier are mostly attributed to the Ranqueles, be it by themselves or accompanied by “Chileans”, *capitanejos* or *caciques* of Salinas Grandes and, in the decade of 1860, *montoneros*<sup>26</sup>. In that sense, while the proportion of *malones* in which an ascription is pointed

out is relatively small, we believe it sounds reasonable to assume a more or less direct link between the areas affected by a *malón* and the closest indigenous territoriality.

This perspective takes into account not only the bigger ease, derived from closeness, of operating on certain points, but also the strategic control of tracks, watering holes and resting places that had an impact in the success of a *malón*<sup>27</sup>. However, this should not imply the attribution of a whole incursion to a particular area to the group that is closest as a whole. The control established by great caciques over their subordinates was not necessarily successful, difficulty that shows itself clearly in the correspondence of leaders like Calfucurá or the Ranquel Mariano Rosas<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, the incursions in which *capitanejos* or *caciques* depending on Calfucurá or the Ranquel leaders show up were not always a result of a policy followed by them. On the other side, the leaders could inhibit—or try to—the *malones* in certain points, in agreement of the compromises assumed with the *cristianos*, and “derive” those groups interested in fighting to other areas far from their control in which local

<sup>24</sup> A deep analysis on the trajectory of this cacique and his group, comparable with the one made on some of his contemporaries, is a debt for current historiography.

<sup>25</sup> They are 23 small *malones*, 14 medium-sized ones, 14 big ones and 5 with no data on size.

<sup>26</sup> There are some significant exceptions to this statement. In December of 1867 and April of 1868 two *malones*, of 300 and 2000 *conas* respectively were attributed exclusively to Calfucurá in the south of Córdoba. This seems noteworthy because of the good ties the cacique had with the *cristianos* at that time, besides of how infrequent actions of that magnitude, in solitary, far from their own frontier territoriality, were. If in the first case the attribution might be a mistake from the frontier commander, the big *malón* of 1868 seems even stranger: the piece of information about the leadership of Calfucurá comes from captive soldiers that were liberated with the express order of informing the authorities that he was the one conducting the invasion. While we do not count on any other element of judgement, we suspect that this might have been a strategy destined to intervene in the pacific relations of the Salineros, maybe originated in the Ranqueles (MMGM 1868 Annexe F:LI-LII and LIV-LVI). A third *malón* is attributed to Calfucurá in Córdoba, in 1871. This is probably due to a mistake from the person who wrote the note because, in fact, it is followed by a punitive expedition on the Ranqueles (MMGM 1871:283-290).

<sup>27</sup> Graciana Pérez Zavala, *Tratados de paz en las pampas: los ranqueles y su devenir político, 1850-1880* (Río Cuarto: Aspha, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Ingrid de Jong, “El negocio de la paz: la trayectoria diplomática de Calfucurá (1860-1873)” in *Pueblos indígenas, conformación de los estados nacionales y fronteras. Tensiones y paradojas de los procesos de transición contemporáneos en América Latina*, compiled by Hugo Trinchero, Luis Campos y Sebastián Valverde. (Buenos Aires: UACH and FFyL- UBA, 2014); Marcela Tamagnini and Graciana Pérez, *El fondo de la tierra. Destinos errantes en la frontera sur* (Río Cuarto: Editorial de la URC, 2010).



groups weren't interested in sustaining pacific relations in certain contexts<sup>29</sup>. The understanding of these dynamics can only be observed indirectly from a perspective like the one we have taken in this article. However, we will see how some elements that vary in respect to the areas affected by incursions and to the composition of those could point to, besides different strategies from Salineros and Ranqueles, various alliances between these groups or fractions of them, as well as the degree of authority of their leaderships.

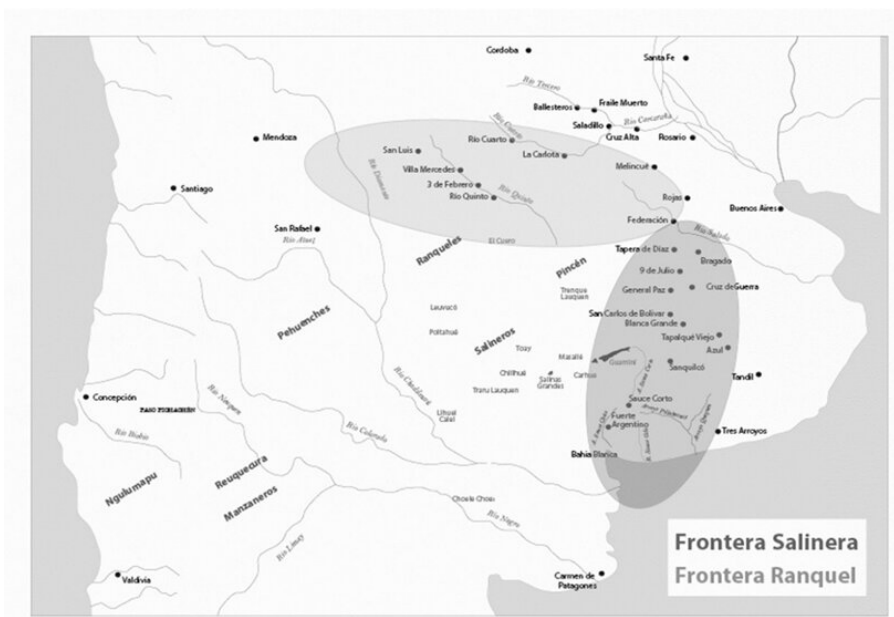
We will disaggregate the *malones* of the period in the two big areas that correspond to the Salinero and the Ranquel territories. We have considered the military sections of Patagones, Bahía Blanca, Costa Sud, South of Buenos Aires and West of Buenos Aires as the "Salinero" frontier. While these fractions of the frontier vary through the period we are covering, their movement was essentially inland, keeping the subdivisions. Carmen de Patagones, by the way, was fundamentally linked to the manzaneros. Nevertheless, the *malones* to that location or its area of influence in which an ascription was noted refer fundamentally to *capitanejos* or groups formally dependent on Calfucurá.

As the "Ranquel" border, we have considered the sections of North of Buenos Aires, South of Santa Fe, South and Southeast of Córdoba, South of San Luis and South de Mendoza, also subject to a movement towards indigenous territory during those years. We are conscious that the inclusion in a single area of this group of frontiers could be debatable.

In its extremes –South of Mendoza and North of Buenos Aires– we have included sectors of the frontier that were not strictly Ranquel areas and that had a significant weight of other groups: the *Pehuenches* of the Mendoza south and the autonomous group of *cacique* Pincén, respectively. However, we have noted that, in both cases, the *malones* in those spaces are usually attributed to the Ranqueles, be it by themselves or accompanied by others.

<sup>29</sup> De Jong, "Las alianzas políticas indígenas en el período..."

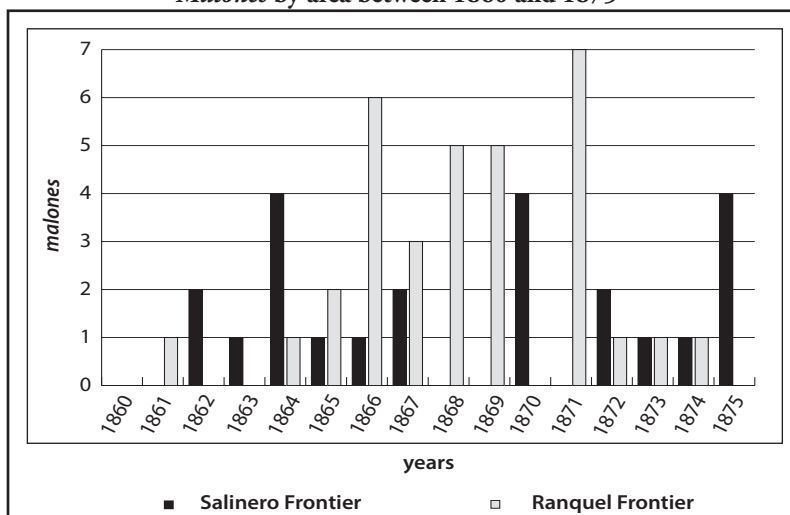
**Map Number 1.**  
**Ranquel and Salinero Frontier**



Source: Own elaboration for illustrative purposes

The distribution of *malones* between the Ranquel and Salinero borders during the years that go from 1860 to 1875 is, then, as shown in Figure Number 3.

**Figure Number 3.**  
***Malones* by area between 1860 and 1875**



Source: Compiled from SHE and MMGM.

We show in this chart only the medium-sized and big *malones*, looking to unlink the unarticulated actions of small groups and get closer to the political strategies of longkos and groups. The first observation is that the relative regularity year by year that we had pointed out seems to no longer be, once the two big areas of occurrence have been distinguished.

In the decade of 1860 the biggest conflict comes from the Ranquel area, which inverts itself briefly during 1870, restarting the following year to go back to getting smaller consolidating pacific bonds towards the end of our period. The relative peace in the Salinero frontier during the first decade that we analyse is a result of the pacific relations sustained by the Salinero leadership, which will go into a crisis in the decade of 1870. The Ranquel groups, on the other hand, only entered a peace treaty briefly in 1865 to return to pacific conversations only at the start of the next decade.

This “mirrored” distribution of the indigenous incursions between both areas is better seen if we only consider the big *malones*—of 500 warriors or more—. This sort of “distribution” of the borders between the big indigenous groups could indicate a unified strategy of the indigenous space, directing the *malón* to different frontiers according to the specific political contexts. However, attending to the multi-centre and competitive nature of indigenous society, we believe an explanation of this kind would be inadequate.

We understand, instead, that the disparity shown by the conflict in the different territories could point towards the existence of a stable amount of “available” warriors to carry out *malones* in different spaces. Both between the Ranquel and Salinera groups and between Cordilleraños and groups from the Araucanía that periodically migrated to the Pampas. It would consist of moving the emphasis on the groups and the great leaders to put it on the less important *longkos* and the *conas*. We could, in this way, contribute to explaining the stability in regards to the number of incursions, taking the indigenous territory as a unity against the notable variation between the different areas. This perspective is also consistent with those *malones* on which we have data regarding the *maloneros*’ ascription, given that in fact the circulation of fractions and leaders of both groups is observable.

The variation in the number of *conas* in what we call big *malones* is a lot bigger than in the other groups. The two most important *malones* of the period, in 1872 with around 3700 warriors and in 1875 with 5000, corresponded to the western and southern borders respectively and were led by the Salineros, allied with other groups—Ranqueles and “Chileans” and Ranqueles, “Chileans” and *indios amigos* from Azul respectively—. The three *malones* that follow in importance, with 2000 warriors, seem to also have been led by Salineros, allied with other groups, except perhaps in one case<sup>30</sup>. With 1300 and 1500 warriors, we note two other *malones*. One of those—in 1864 in the Buenos Aires

<sup>30</sup> The *malón* of which we doubt the Salinero conduction is the one already mentioned in the previous note.

south— seems to correspond to Salineros, Cordilleranos and maybe friendly Indians<sup>31</sup>. Of the remaining two, in the Santa Fe south, we only have information about the ascription on one of them—in 1862—in which *capitanejos* of Calfucurá led by Ranquel *caciques*, participated. The big *malones* with between 500 and 1000 warriors, on the other hand, do not always show up associated by the sources to an alliance between different groups. Thereby, in three of them, occurred in the “Ranquel frontier”, only these are mentioned, or linked to *montoneros*<sup>32</sup>. Another two, to the Buenos Aires frontiers, are only attributed to Salineros, eventually accompanied by “Chileans” or *Cordilleranos*. In another two, lastly, both groups seems allied.

Based on the above we will point out some issues. Firstly, we confirm the circulation of warriors between the Ranquel and Salinero areas to participate in incursions. Secondly, we note that the biggest *malones* happened in the Salinero area, reflecting not only a slightly bigger population but also a more accentuated capacity of Calfucurá, and afterwards of his children, to succeed in making calls to war capable of surpassing the thousand warriors and to even multiply that number. A third aspect is that the Ranquel power,

when it managed big military mobilizations, seems mostly associated to the presence of Salinero allies or others. This dependence does not seem to have been symmetric as long as a similar strength to the maximum reached by Ranqueles, accompanied by Salineros *capitanejos*, was convened in some occasions exclusively by Salineros<sup>33</sup>.

Let us get back now to the *malones* we have categorized as “medium-sized”. These incursions, as we have sustained, did not require neither big *caciques* nor the articulation of different partialities. The decision of a secondary *cacique* with a certain ability to convene or of an autonomous group of the great associations was enough to carry on an incursion of this kind. Same as in the big *malones*, there where the sources attribute these *malones* to some group, it's the one coinciding with the one closest to the frontier the *malón* attacked, even though those who appear as leading the *maloqueiros*, when it has been registered, are usually less known *caciques*.

We consider that this low occurrence of *malones* in sectors where the leaders held diplomatic relations points to another dimension of territorial control on their part that we've already mentioned: their capability to inhibit incursions that could put agreements that they had some interest

<sup>31</sup> SHE, Box 18 Doc. 3231 and MMGM 1866, Annexe G.9-14.

<sup>32</sup> Besides the one already put in doubt that links Coliqueo and Calfucurá in 1868.

<sup>33</sup> In the Ranquel frontier, we registered a single *malón* that got to 2000 warriors, whose doubtful attribution to Calfucurá was already established in footnote 14. In order of importance, it's followed by two *malones* with 1500 warriors in which the participation of Salineros is pointed out: at the south of Santa Fe in June 1862 (SHE, Box 8, 594, 596, 599 and 600) and November 1868 (SHE, Box 27 Doc. 1028, 1029, 1030, 1033, 1034, 1032 and 4805). With 1000 *comas* we registered one in Córdoba in November 1865 (SHE, Box 18, 3217 and 3043) and in the south of Santa Fe in April of 1869 (SHE, Box 28, Doc. 1062) and May of 1871 (MMGM 1872:8-15), being this probably the biggest number the Ranqueles could mobilize by themselves. In contrast, Salineros were able to mobilize close to 2000 attackers in November 1862 and at least 1300 in April 1864 (SHE, box 13, Doc. 561). The coalitions led by them, on the other hand, got to the highest points with 2000 *comas* in October 1870 (MMGM 1871:252-254), 3700 in March 1872 (MMGM 1872:102-132) and 5000 in December 1875 (MMGM 1876:15-33).

in maintaining in danger. This required the big *caciques* to turn to a combination of strategies, not always successful, facing the difficulty of imposing punitive measures against those that did not go along with the existing agreements. These strategies, dependent on the parental and reciprocal logic of indigenous society, could include persuasion, the realisation of feasts and the distribution of part of the obtained in rations or, with eventual consequences on their own authority, the plain collaboration with the Christian authorities, warning about incursions being planned<sup>34</sup> or giving back what was obtained<sup>35</sup>.

We will resume then our proposal of warrior contingents conducted by “available” secondary leaders, but we will add here the role of the big *caciques* and their variable margins of action to explain the particular dynamic of frontier violence. Thus, far from an unambiguous strategy, the indigenous military policy seems like the result of heterogeneous practices, no longer only between the main groups and *cacicatos* but in their interiors, that required pacts and agreements in order to manage articulating different fractions for the realisation of *malones* in different points of the frontier. These articulations were conditioned by the actuate of big *caciques*, whose margin of action, in turn, depended on the capacity to influence their followers of lesser hierarchy and on the global context of the indigenous space against the *cristianos*.

## THE RESULTS OF THE *MALÓN*.

The *malones*, in their most practical sense, were military actions destined to the appropriation of goods, particularly in the shape of cattle and captives. This characteristic is without a doubt central to the traditional images on the indigenous groups and the justificatory literature about the conquest. What was, however, the real weight of the extractions of cattle or other goods by way of indigenous loots? Some figures proposed contemporaneously to the validity of the frontier, very unequal between them, have usually been taken uncritically through the years. Julio A. Roca calculated an average of 40.000 head per year looted in the Pampas and subsequently sold in the Chilean markets. Some years before, Álvaro Barros had elevated that number to 150.000 stolen head. Olascoaga<sup>36</sup>, lastly, rose the number to 200.000 head per year. Affirmations basing themselves in these rather vague calculations still belong to the common sense of historiography.

We have decided to try out a number more according to the sources of the exactions of cattle during the years we are analysing. Without a doubt, many of the difficulties already perceived, presented by the sources, are still present in this aspect. Thus, for only 137 *malones* (76% of the total) we have some references on the cattle taken by the Indians. These references, on the other hand, only in some exceptional cases imply a detailed

<sup>34</sup> There are numerous sources that note warnings of the *caciques* about *malones* being planned. Among these we mention SHE Box 19, Doc. 981, Box 22 Doc. 927, Box 24 Doc s/n and Box 26 Doc. 1080 and 1079.

<sup>35</sup> MMGM 1868, Annexe F:XVI.

<sup>36</sup> Álvaro Barros, *Indios, Fronteras y Seguridad Interior* (Buenos Aires: Solar-Hachette, [1875] 1975); Álvaro Barros y Julio Argentino Roca, *Sobre el sistema de seguridad interior. Cartas del general D. Julio Argentino Roca y del coronel Alvaro Barros* (Buenos Aires: El Nacional, 1876); José Manuel Olascoaga, *Estudio Topográfico de la pampa y el río negro* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba [1880] 1974).



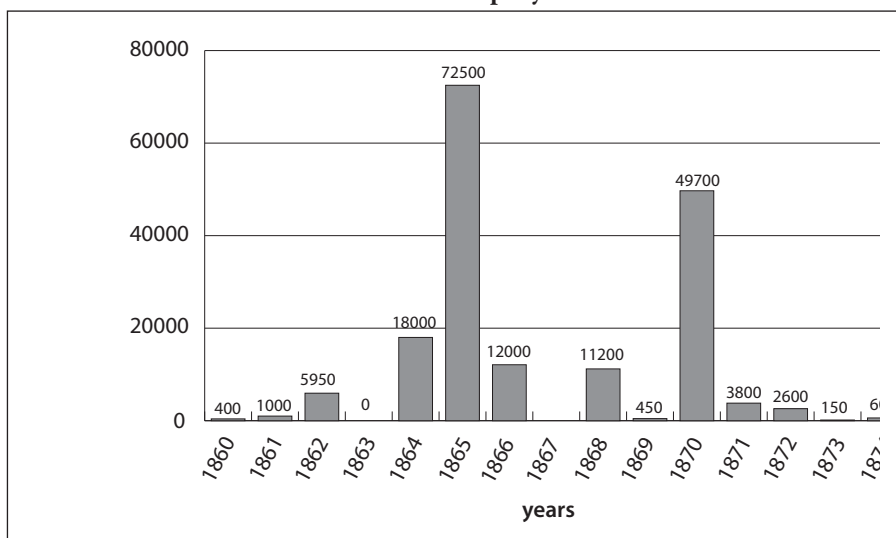
report of the lost cattle. More usually, we find an approximate estimation, written immediately after the incursion happened. As it happened with other aspects, the big *malones* are often richer regarding the information provided by the sources.

The first aspect to take into account is that not always did the *maloneros* manage to take cattle or often, if they did, it was recovered during the chase by the troops. On the total of 137 incursions, in 63 (46%) it is explicitly pointed out that the entirety of the belongings were took by the *cristianos* or that they never got to capture any animals. Additionally, in numerous incursions the denounced looting is quantitatively lacking: some tens of animals or expressions like “a small drove”, “a herd”, “some” or “the drove of horses of the fort”. We consider reasonable, too, to assume that those *malones* where the report did not consider it necessary to specify the loss of any belongings probably correspond to invasions that were not successful or at least not very successful. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that most of the *malones* failed regarding the capture of cattle.

Of course, this did not always happen. In fact, there's a mention in 74 *malones* –54% of the 138 in which belongings are mentioned and 41% of the total amount– of numbers of animals taken by the Indians or of expressions like “numerous droves”, “large roundups” or “good steal”, that indicate the success of the incursion. In these cases, the Indians took different quantities of cattle, which go from a couple hundred to tens of thousands of head of cattle. Only in 42 of this 74 successful *malones* do the sources give

us concrete estimations of the number of animals looted. Basing ourselves on this we constructed figure number four, in which we've considered exclusively the cattle that's noted as effectively taken by the *maloqueros*. That is to say, there where a number is mentioned but, in the same document or in the subsequent documents, the values corresponding to the recuperation by the Christian troops also appear, we have subtracted these last ones.

**Figure Number 4.**  
**Cattle herded per year**



Source: Compiled from SHE and MMGM.

The first thing we can observe is that, at least for these fifteen years, the amounts of cattle seem to be very far from the more conservative estimations we've quoted. Of course, not having numbers on around twenty of successful *malones*, the quantities noted in the graph imply an underestimation. However, even if we supposed that those on which we have no information could duplicate the amounts of cattle, only in three of the investigated years could we surpass the numbers sustained by Roca, being either way quite lower than the ones proposed by Barros and Olascoaga. Said exercise, on the other hand, would probably be an exaggeration. For the years in which we have effectively observed big steals we have

identified clearly a very limited number of *malones* of greater magnitude in which most of the animals were stolen<sup>37</sup>. As we have pointed out many a time before, these are the incursions that, because of their significance, have left the most documentation.

The data we have presented is intended to diminish the economic importance of the appropriation of cattle by means of *malones*. While it's indubitable that in some cases it led to an important flux of goods towards "the inland", their irregularity and inefficiency—expressed in the grand majority of cases, in which the loot was retrieved by the troops—makes it difficult to consider it a central aspect

<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, more than 30% of the total of the period corresponds to a single *malón*, while 91% of the cattle taken is explained by merely 7 *malones*. Ordered by amount of head of cattle stolen, these were: 70,000 in the south and west border of Buenos Aires in 1875; 49,000 in the Costa Sud border in 1879; 30,000 in the south of Buenos Aires in 1865; 20,000 in Córdoba in 1865; 14,200 in Costa Sud in 1864; 12,000 at the same place the following year; and 10,000 in Córdoba in 1866 (Respectively: MMGM 1876:15-33; SHE, Box 32, Doc 1223, 1227 and 18b 5999; SHE, Box 18 Doc. 3217, 9043 and 3231; SHE, Box 13, Doc. 550; SHE, Box 18, Doc. 3231, MMGM 1855 Annexe G:9-14; MMGM 1868:37-42). As it is to be expected, in all cases they're big *malones*. It is worth noting, at the same time, that most of the cattle stolen corresponds to the province of Buenos Aires.

of the indigenous economy. We agree in this regard with Alioto<sup>38</sup> that the indigenous society could not depend on such an eventual source of subsistence, in addition to the non-strategic nature that its subsistence would have entrusted to it.

Another aspect of the success of the *malones* in the Pampas is associated with the capture of people and their captivity. Unlike with the other data that we have tried to systematize, the sources are usually richer regarding this, being habitual for not only the amount of captives in a *malón* to be mentioned but also their age, sex and not an ignorable amount of times, their names and occupations. While we don't have any way to estimate the eventual underreporting we suppose this special interest the authorities have on giving account of these situations, otherwise understandable, could maybe imply a more exhaustive record than the one we found regarding cattle. Of the 179 *malones* we have counted, population or soldiers were captured in 30 occasions, around 17%. The captivity does not seem associated to the magnitude of the *malones*; we can find it in the three types we have distinguished, even though, as it is expected, we find a bigger number in the big *malones*. In total, during those

years 757 settlers<sup>39</sup> or soldiers were forcibly taken to the *tolderías*, 696 (92%) of which correspond to only 5 *malones*, almost all of them “big” *malones*<sup>40</sup>, among which in only one 500 captives were captured (66%)<sup>41</sup>. The practise of captivity, while present, seems then less generalized than what might be assumed and is maybe associated to particular contexts: not in all the incursions, and neither in all the big ones, were people being captured. In this sense, it could have been an eventual practise rather than a systematic one except in particular occasions that we will see in the next chapter, given that it demands delving into contextual aspects that exceed the approach we are taking here.

One last aspect of the effects of the indigenous incursions remains to be considered: the deaths produced in the context of the *malones*. In the same way as the captives, these are often registered with more detail in the consulted sources, because of which we estimate the underreporting could be a minor problem. We have identified 24 *malones* in which 519 settlers died, corresponding 400 of those –81%– to a single big *malón*<sup>42</sup>. Additionally, in 13 *malones* –that do not overlap with the previous ones– 210 soldiers or militiamen died, 151 of them in four

<sup>38</sup> Sebastián Alioto, “Las yeguas y las chacras de Calfucurá: economía y política del cacicato salinero (1853-1859)” in *Amigos, hermanos y parientes. Líderes y liderados en las Sociedades Indígenas de la pampa oriental (Siglo XIX)*, edited by Daniel Villar et al. (Bahía Blanca: Centro de Documentación Patagónica – Departamento de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional del Sur, 2011), 197-217.

<sup>39</sup> In five occasions the documents point out the captivity of “a few” or “some”, without mentioning a number.

<sup>40</sup> Towards the end of November, 1866, a big Ranquel invasion to the south of Córdoba took at least 54 captives, subtracting a bigger number that could have been rescued (MMGM 1868 Annexe F:XXXVIII to XLVII). In April of the following year, in the south of Santa Fe, 12 captives (SHE, Box 22, Doc 934 and 935). In July 1868, again in the Santa Fe south 19 captives (SHE, Box 26, Doc. 1001 and 1005). In July 1870, in the Buenos Aires south, 24 captives interchanged a couple months later (SHE, Box 32, Doc 1223, 1227, 18b 5999, and 18c 6145; MMGM 1871 Annexe G:216-226). In December of 1875 in the Buenos Aires south 500 captives are mentioned (MMGM 1876:15-33). In November 1868 in Mendoza, 100 captives are mentioned. It is the only episode with a big amount of captives that belongs to a “medium-sized” *malón* (MMGM 1869 Annex G). In December of 1875 in the Buenos Aires south 500 captives are mentioned (MMGM 1876:15-33).

<sup>41</sup> In December of 1875 in the Buenos Aires south 500 captives are mentioned (MMGM 1876:15-33).

<sup>42</sup> It was the last *malón* that our cutting covers and the most numerous of the period. It counted with the participation of both Salineros and Ranqueles, united for the last time in a big coalition, as well as “friendly Indians” of Azul and Tapalqué that lost due to this great rebellion their lands in the frontier and their role as government allies (MMGM 1876:15-33).

occasions only<sup>43</sup>. Thus, in the same way that we observed regarding captivity, the murder of settlers or the death of armed enemies doesn't seem to show systematicity, be it because that wasn't the central objective of the *malón* or because their own nature –the appropriation of goods followed by a quick fleeing, trying to avoid the confrontation– contributed to avoid them<sup>44</sup>.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we set ourselves to elaborate a systematization of the indigenous incursions during the period, trusting that it would allow the presentation of a more adjusted image than the one elaborated by the traditional historiography. Now is the moment to lay down some conclusions at which we have arrived or, at least, hypotheses that seem consistent with what we have been showing until now.

The economical and human effects of the indigenous incursions have shown to be, while relevant, a lot less significant than they are habitually described as. At least for the period we have considered, most of the *malones* were not successful in their capture of cattle, be it because they were discovered before they could appropriate it or because they lost it during

the later flee. The image of thousands of head of cattle flowing towards indigenous territory should probably be revised or narrowed to particular situations and, in any case, it was below the habitually postulated numbers by a big margin. However, approximately a third of the incursions were successful and their importance in indigenous economy, while hard to evaluate, was probably significant. We believe, nevertheless, that this way of introduction of cattle in the indigenous commercial circles could not have constituted a constant flow capable of sustaining them by itself, rather contributing as an additional resource whose foreseeability turns out to be clearly uncontrollable.

Regarding captivity and death, we have observed that they do not seem to show the systematicity one might assume. The final number, by the way, does not become any less significant because of it. The fact that it is encapsulated in isolated situations indicates a rationed nature of these ways of violence, very different between them by the way.

Between 1860 and 1875 we have registered a total of 179 *malones* that happened in a relatively regular fashion with little over 10 incursions per year. This regularity kept being observed in the “medium-sized” and “big” *malones*.

<sup>43</sup> In March 1871 an attack of an allied group of Ranqueles and soldiers recently in revolt, took place in the south of Córdoba, and its death toll, the biggest one in the period, was of 65 soldiers and officials, some of whose bodies were mutilated (MMGM:276-280). The second in amount of victims belongs to the big *malón* –of 3700 warriors– that culminated in the battle of San Carlos in the Buenos Aires south. 4 soldiers and 30 “friendly Indians” were dead in combat, while the *maloneros* lost around 200 men (MMGM 1872:102-132, SHE Box 35 Doc. 20 7476 and 20 6488) A few months afterwards and not far from there, a party of 21 soldiers that was chasing a group of *maloneros* was surrounded, all their members dying (MMGM 1873:191-131).

<sup>44</sup> The sources we have consulted do not allow us to try a comparable counting with the prisoners and dead indigenous people, be it in the context of *malones* or in punitive expeditions on the *tolderías*. The military communications are not usually detailed in that regard and, on the other hand, the indigenous practise of taking the cadavers of their companions with them would make an approximation of that kind very difficult. However, it seems obvious that *cristiana* violence was greater.

The small incursions, they seem to have dominated over the *malones* of bigger importance during this whole period. We believe that these kinds of actions seem difficult to distinguish from other phenomena of illegal appropriation of cattle, typical of the frontier spaces, which involved both the indigenous population and the *cristiana* one. That was possibly linked with the local informal circuits of cattle trade, which was habitually denounced in sources of the time pointing out the participation of diverse frontier actors in them, such as traders, gatherers and civil and military authorities.

The *malones* we have named “medium-sized” and “big” show a relative regularity if we take into account the Southern Frontier as a whole. This image, in which we observe relevant *malones* in all years, consistent with the traditional image of permanent violence unfolding in the frontiers, is noticeably modified when we start to distinguish different areas and frontier sections. Once we have done that, we observe a significant heterogeneity between very conflicting sectors against those where we do not register important incursions. The conflictive areas, on the other hand, are not usually superposed in the same year, making it so that while a sector of the indigenous frontier shows important *malones*, the usual is for the situation in the other sectors to be a peaceful one.

This distribution of the indigenous *malones*, constant on the borders as a whole, but alternated between different sections of the same, in line with differentiated policies of the big *cacicatos*, could allow supposing a homogeneous

strategy arranged by the combination of the indigenous groups. We believe, however, that a different explanation would be more accurate. The perspective of a unified indigenous strategy, besides being contradictory with what we know of the indigenous political structure, clashes with the strategies deployed by the great *caciques* to sustain pacific relationships there were that was the followed policy.

We have observed a sort of division of the indigenous borders, “Salinero” and “Ranquel”, according to which the incursions in one or the other were led in almost all cases by leaders or associations belonging to the closest group, reflecting not only the closeness but also the knowledge and control of tracks and other strategic spaces. Other participant groups –Pampeanos and extra-Pampeanos– in one or other area, did it in the role of subordinates, with a certain asymmetry of Salinero power in contrast with the Ranquel, in relation to their ability to convene. This points to a recognized territoriality that extended to the points of *maloneo* over the Christian populations.

However, this territoriality, fundamental to the violent incursions, also had significance in the sustaining of the peace. Thus, the main *caciques* showed a big interest in maintaining the peace on those points in which they received rations or maintained commercial relations. For this to happen they had to resort to different strategies that we have mentioned here. The few important *malones* in the Salinero frontier during the most part of the decade



of 1860 and the Ranquel frontier starting on 1872 show that they were relatively successful. Between these strategies we'll mention fundamentally the "detour" of warriors interested in *malonear* towards other frontiers where the local contexts allowed violence without putting at risk the equilibrium reached by the *caciques* in their areas of influence.

Nevertheless, it is possible as well to move the focus from the great *longkos* and put it on the secondary *caciques* and *capitanejos*, capable of organizing and effectuating "medium-sized" incursions, or adding themselves to major ones independently of their formal leaders. Thus we can imagine a significant but difficult to determine number of secondary leaders and *conas* "available" to participate in attacks on different points of the frontier, going through the limits of the partialities, that were by themselves weak, according to the diverse political contexts in which the main *caciques* could or would want to call them. These "second lines" of indigenous military power would permit explaining the stability of *malón* violence without postulating a unified strategy of the big leaderships. Thereby, from our perspective, the relative regularity of the indigenous incursions between 1860 and 1875, far from expressing a homogeneous policy of aggression or resistance could instead be a result of the limits that indigenous policies put in the nature of leadership.

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